

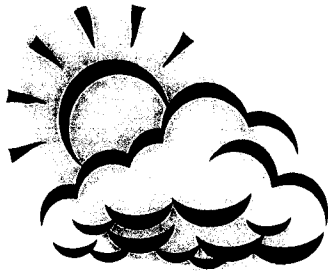
*Department
of
Human Services*

Articles in Today's Clips

Friday, March 10, 2006

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*Prepared by the
DHS Office of
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**Important story at
this spot*

TOPIC	PAGE
Child/Family	2-3
*Holland Case	4-11
*Child Welfare	12-18
Wage Hike	19-24
DHS/Genesee County	25
*Child Care	26-27
Child Support	28-31
Faith Based Charities	32-33
*Camp Highfields	34
Miscellaneous	35-36
Welfare	37-38
News Releases	39-42

Pontiac a 'trouble spot' for infant mortality

Web-posted Mar 5, 2006

By CAROL HOPKINS

Of The Oakland Press

Infant deaths in Michigan in 2004 were at the lowest level on record, state officials reported recently, but Oakland County health officials say more work needs to be done in Pontiac.

Pontiac continues to be our trouble spot," said George Miller, health officer for Oakland County Health Division. Deaths among black babies in Pontiac jumped from 21.4 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2002 to 26.1 deaths in 2004.

That rate compares poorly with 8.2 deaths among whites per 1,000 live births in Pontiac in 2002 and 7.9 in 2004.

Pontiac had 16 infant death cases in 2004, Miller said.

Pontiac had 16 infant death cases in 2004, Miller said.

The biggest reason for the deaths, he said, was no prenatal care, poor nutrition or the mother had significant infections.

Miller noted that the mothers involved either didn't know how to get care or couldn't get to a doctor. "Maybe they thought they could do it on their own," Miller said.

Several were inexperienced teen mothers.

"That factors in," he said.

Jan Carpenter, clinical supervisor of baby and children's programs at Pontiac-based Oakland Family Services, said she believes families with the greatest needs often don't have access to transportation.

Carpenter praised area programs and services "that do home visiting."

There was some good news in Southfield, Miller said, where an "aggressive action team" is working to help pregnant women. In 2003, the infant death rate among blacks in the city was 17.9 per 1000. In 2004, it decreased to 13.8.

In the state, 128 fewer infants died in Michigan in 2004 than in 2003. The number of infant deaths declined from 1,112 in 2003 to 984 in 2004.

Data also reveal that while the white infant mortality rate decreased from 6.7 per 1,000 live births in 2003 to 5.2 per 1,000 live births in 2004, the infant mortality rate among blacks only decreased from 17.5 per 1,000 live births in 2003 to 17.3 per 1,000 live births in 2004.

Although the overall news is encouraging, Michigan Department of Community Health Director Janet Olszewski said the issue must be examined more closely, especially the disparities between deaths of black and white infants.

While there are efforts to spread information to pregnant mothers in the county - a billboard campaign began in 2005 and area health workers are partnering - Miller stressed that community health officials still have work ahead of them.

"We need to get our arms around more of these women so we can stop these deaths," Miller said.

To get the report

The full report on statewide infant mortality rates can be found at [www. michigan.gov/mdch](http://www.michigan.gov/mdch). Click on "Health Statistics" and then "Vital Statistics," which include infant mortality.

Breaking news

Doctor: Ricky Holland's skull was fractured in 2 places

Expert testifies the boy also had a broken shoulder blade and collarbone

March 10, 2006

By JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Ricky Holland's skull was fractured in two places in the nasal region and the boy also had a broken shoulder blade and collarbone when he died, an assistant professor in the anthropology department at Michigan State University testified today.

The 7-year-old boy's body was wrapped in a sheet and then stuffed into garbage bags and dumped in a field in Leroy Township. A diaper also was inside the garbage bags, said Dr. Todd Senton, who was testifying in 55th District Court in Mason.

Ricky's adoptive parents, Lisa and Tim Holland, are charged with murder and first-degree child abuse in his death. The boy's skeletal remains were found Jan. 27.

Senton said MSU's anthropologists are called on about 60 times a year to work with police agencies. An expert in osteology, his job is to identify skeletal remains and determine the circumstances surrounding the death.

The preliminary examination for the Hollands is expected to continue this afternoon in Judge Rosemarie Aquilina's courtroom

Records: Parents' deception shrouded years of abuse

March 10, 2006

BY JACK KRESNAK

DETROIT FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

JACKSON -- Social workers who checked on Ricky Holland's welfare every month for more than three years frequently praised his foster parents for doing a "wonderful job" with Ricky and his siblings, according to state records obtained by the Free Press.

But those records, as well as interviews with former neighbors, provide signs that Tim and Lisa Holland may have lied about Ricky's supposed violent behavior, and exaggerated his emotional problems to school officials and a child psychiatrist.

Ingham County prosecutors are trying to prove that Lisa Holland frequently misled people about the children's welfare while mentally and physically abusing Ricky for four years.

An example of the Hollands' alleged deceptions is found in their foster-care licensing file that was obtained by the Free Press under the state Freedom of Information Act.

In February 2004, when a foster-care worker from the state Department of Human Services asked the Hollands about how they handled discipline, Ricky, who was in the interview, "started to cry." Holland said they used time-outs and loss of privileges to discipline him.

When asked why he reacted that way, his mother told the worker Ricky "had a hard day at school and was upset because he had been kicked off the bus that day," the report said.

But that was not true, according to testimony from the bus driver, Marcia Polly, at the preliminary exam last week: Ricky was never kicked off the school bus.

In fact, Polly and her bus aide, Joan Thomas, testified that Ricky was a well-behaved child and that they refused Lisa Holland's demand that they put him in a restraint harness because of his impulsive behavior.

Polly and Thomas said they contacted Child Protective Services about what they described as Lisa Holland's meanness toward Ricky, but the foster-care file does not reflect that.

The Hollands are charged with murder and first-degree child abuse in the death of Ricky, a 7-year-old whose skeletal remains were found Jan. 27, six months after his parents reported he had run away from their Leroy Township home.

The family's foster-care licensing file, containing yearly reports by social workers who visited the Hollands every month, paints a generally positive picture of Tim and Lisa Holland's care for Ricky and his three siblings, who now live with relatives under state supervision.

But the documents and interviews with the Hollands' former neighbors, show that Lisa Holland may have misrepresented Ricky's psychological symptoms.

On several occasions, Lisa Holland told Jackson public school officials, neighbors and Ricky's psychiatrist that he was violent and impulsive, according to court testimony.

But school officials and the boy's court-assigned attorney, who met with Ricky frequently, say they never saw any evidence of that behavior. And the foster-care record shows no indication the Hollands made similar reports to social workers.

The Hollands -- who were paid more than \$2,200 a month by the state to care for the four children -- were not licensed to care for children with severe emotional disorders like those allegedly described by Lisa Holland. They were licensed only to care for children with mild problems.

A preliminary examination for the Hollands, who police said blamed each other in Ricky's death, is set to continue today in 55th District Court in Mason.

Ingham County prosecutors want to prove that the couple abused Ricky by tormenting and starving him for more than four years in the Hollands' two-story home on Pierce Street in Jackson and at the home near Williamston, where they moved in May 2005.

Ricky was 3 in October 2000 when the department placed him with the Hollands after his biological mother said she wanted her son placed in foster care, according to Jackson County Family Court records.

Ricky's court-assigned attorney, James Treciak, met frequently with Ricky in his law office and said Thursday that he never suspected the boy was being abused in the Hollands' home.

Treciak represented Ricky and the boy's three siblings during hearings in Jackson County Family Court for about three years until the children were adopted by the Hollands.

"In my experience, the agency jumps all over foster parents when allegations are made," Treciak said.

"I had no inclination or suspicion that they were not in a safe foster-care placement and adoption placement."

Former neighbors in Jackson said they thought it strange that Lisa Holland, 33, kept her children inside and allowed babies to cry for hours on end without tending to them. But none of them ever called Child Protective Services.

Julie Hewlett, who lives across the street from the Hollands' former home, said she once asked Lisa Holland why Ricky didn't play outside.

"He's not the kind that likes playing outside," Lisa Holland said, according to Hewlett. "He's the kind that wants to stay inside and watch TV."

Hewlett said Lisa Holland also told her, without prompting, about Ricky's supposed mental and emotional problems -- in front of the boy. Hewlett said Ricky looked embarrassed.

Hewlett also said that twice last winter, she heard a baby crying for long stretches through an open second-story bedroom window at the Holland home.

"It was pretty darn cold," Hewlett said. "That window was open all the way and I kept thinking, why does she have that window open?" referring to Lisa Holland.

Another neighbor, Kim DeVaughn, also said she heard a baby crying for hours at a time.

"I hardly knew she had kids except for the baby crying at night," DeVaughn said.

The only times DeVaughn said she saw Lisa Holland was on two occasions when DeVaughn had garage sales and Lisa Holland came by to purchase baby clothes. They lived next door to each other.

In April 2004, after school officials turned down Lisa Holland's request to declare Ricky certified for special education services -- something not reflected in the department records provided to the Free Press by the state -- Lisa Holland removed him from the school and said she would homeschool him.

Ricky, whose first-grade teacher said he begged not to be taken out of school, never returned to Cascades Elementary in Jackson. A year later, the family moved to Ingham County. Last November, four months after Ricky disappeared, the couple told DHS workers that they wanted to stop being foster parents, a final report from the department said. At that time, the police investigation was focusing increasingly on Tim and Lisa Holland. "Lisa stated that she and her husband are under a lot of stress ... and that things are really hectic at this time," the report said. "She indicated that she is doing her best to keep things together, but that this year has been very traumatic for the entire family."

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

Published March 10, 2006

[From the Lansing State Journal]

More letters to the editor

Fund child services

The tragic story about Ricky Holland goes beyond the parents, it goes all the way to the Legislature. Legislators should stop bickering, start working more cooperatively with each other and seriously look at the state budget.

As an analyst in the Children's Special Health Care Division, I know common sense would have shown the budget is way too small to adequately provide staffing to the Department of Human Services. Wake up, legislators!

It's tragically too late for Ricky Holland, but not for others. Give DHS the proper amount of funding and staffing to provide the services they are supposed to provide. It could mean the difference in someone's life.

Connie Kapugia
Dimondale

Published March 10, 2006

[From the Lansing State Journal]

Holland hearing: Complex and long

Circumstantial evidence adds to challenges

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

The challenge for prosecutors to tie together circumstantial evidence is leading the preliminary hearing for Tim and Lisa Holland into unusual legal territory.

The length and scope of the hearing - which this morning enters its sixth day of testimony - is rare, legal experts say.

"When you're dealing with circumstantial evidence, you need a lot of it because the inferences drawn from that have to be reasonable," said Ron Bretz, a Thomas M. Cooley Law School professor who worked for 20 years as a public defender.

The hearing will decide whether the murder case against the Hollands will advance to trial. They are charged with killing their 7-year-old adopted son, Ricky.

Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings III said this week the case is complicated, and it will take time to present all the facts.

"This is not a case where somebody in a fit of anger committed a crime in front of other witnesses," Dunnings said.

Calls seeking comment from defense attorneys for both Tim and Lisa Holland were not returned.

Usually a couple of hours

Preliminary hearings, where a district court judge must decide whether to send a case to circuit court, usually last a couple of hours or are waived by defendants.

Two days is considered a long time.

"A murder prelim lasting this long, I believe, is unheard of," Bretz said.

For a case to proceed to circuit court, a judge must first decide that a crime has been committed, and second, that the defendant or defendants could have committed it - a much lower burden of proof than a criminal trial.

Bretz cites the fact that prosecutors don't appear to have direct evidence against the Hollands as the main reason for the hearing's length.

That means they have to build their case using several seemingly unrelated pieces that when put together will show what they believe happened, he said.

The Hollands are charged with open murder, but prosecutors are trying to develop a case that they abused Ricky for more than three years.

Dunnings said they might seek felony murder charges. To prove that, they have to show that the murder was committed in the course of another felony - first-degree child abuse.

"To prove child abuse of a dead child requires a lot of witnesses," Bretz said.

Prosecutors have said they plan to call 28 witnesses.

After five days of testimony from about a dozen witnesses, evidence of physical abuse has been scant: a school nurse who testified she once found bruises on Ricky's upper body and a bus driver's assistant who described once seeing a bruise on the side of his forehead.

But a child psychiatrist who treated Ricky for several years, a school social worker and school psychologist all testified they never saw or reported signs of abuse.

Bretz cautioned against trying to guess what the extent of the preliminary hearing process might mean for one side or the other in the Holland case.

"When a preliminary hearing lasts this long," he said, "the only conclusion you can draw is that it's a very complicated case."

Lawyer expects trial

Local defense attorney Bernie Finn said it's more than likely the case will go to trial.

Of the 500 criminal cases Finn has handled - including about three dozen murder cases - fewer than five were not bound over for trial.

And in those few cases, he said, there was a serious failure in the system.

Finn said: "I tell my clients all the time, 'If you think this is not going to get bound over, you don't need a lawyer, you need a magician.' "

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

Mar 10, 6:51 AM EST
Monroe Evening News

Lawyer for slain Williamston boy says he didn't see abuse

MASON, Mich. (AP) -- The court-appointed lawyer for Ricky Holland, whose adoptive parents are accused of murdering him, says there were no obvious signs that the boy was being abused.

James Treciak met frequently with Ricky in his law office and said Thursday that he never suspected that Ricky was being abused at home, according to the Detroit Free Press.

Treciak represented Ricky and his three siblings during Jackson County Family Court hearings for about three years until the children were adopted by Lisa and Tim Holland.

"I had no inclination or suspicion that they were not in a safe foster-care placement and adoption placement," Treciak said.

A preliminary examination was to resume Friday in Mason District Court for the Hollands. They face an open murder charge and a charge of first-degree child abuse.

The couple became Ricky's foster parents in 2000 and adopted him in 2003. In April 2005, they moved from Jackson to Williamston.

Ricky, 7, was reported missing July 2, 2005. On Jan. 27, 2006, Tim Holland led authorities to his decomposed remains in rural Ingham County in late January. Tim and Lisa Holland deny being responsible for Ricky's death and have accused each other of killing him.

Information from: Detroit Free Press, <http://www.freep.com>

Program tries to change how foster care operates

Family to Family plan would place kids with relatives

By Kathy Barks Hoffman
Associated Press

The state is trying to keep more children out of foster care by working with parents and trying to place children with relatives if they have to be removed from their parents.

"Family to Family has as its goal to keep children at home as much as possible if we can do so safely," state Human Services director Marianne Udow told reporters Thursday. "We have made a fundamental change in philosophy" regarding foster care over the past two years.

The Family to Family approach already is in place in 38 counties. This year, it will be spread to 28 more counties, so 85 percent of children will be in counties covered by the program. The state had 18,733 children in foster care last year.

Udow also said her department is investigating more complaints of child abuse and neglect and finding more of those complaints are warranted.

While the number of complaints dropped by about 100 to 128,884 between 2000 and 2005, the number of complaints investigated rose from 69,400 five years ago to 72,286 last year.

The number of cases in which abuse or neglect was confirmed rose from 15,210 to 18,100, and the number of children found to be abused or neglected rose from 26,888 to 28,192.

Child deaths attributable to abuse or neglect stayed the same, with 52 in both 2000 and 2004, the most recent year for which data is available.

"Fifty-two is unacceptable," Udow said. "We've had too many kids who have been abandoned. Moms don't know they can take the child to a hospital ... no questions asked."

Child deaths also have been caused by parents putting infants to sleep on their stomachs, which can impede the infants' breathing, or suffocating them when they roll over them in bed, she said.

Udow declined to discuss the death of Ricky Holland, a 7-year-old whose adoptive parents have been charged with killing him, now that court proceedings are under way.

UDOW: CHILD WELFARE PROGRAM IMPROVING

The Department of Human Services is working to improve Child Protective Services and other child welfare programs, but Director Marianne Udow said the department is facing higher workloads with no increases in caseworkers.

While the number of complaints actually dropped to 128,884 in 2005 from 128,982 in 2000, the number of investigations increased to 72,286 from 15,210 and the number of confirmed cases rose to 18,110 from 15,210. And that increase came while the number of case workers remained at about 750, Ms. Udow said during a media roundtable on the issue Thursday.

"What this is is a picture of families under stress," Ms. Udow said. "It is an issue for the community at large that we're seeing this level of complaints."

She said it was of particular concern that more of the complaints are regarding more serious levels of abuse and neglect.

Ms. Udow said she hopes to overcome some of the increased caseload for CPS workers by hiring additional workers under the proposed budget for her department, but she is also trying to overcome the increased workload through better management and technology.

All of the CPS managers will be through training by the end of the fiscal year that will help them to better prioritize cases, Ms. Udow said. "That supervisor level is critical in terms of best practices," she said, noting that many of the CPS managers have left under recent early retirement plans.

While the department's new computer system is creating some additional work for caseworkers initially, she said in the end it will save work and ensure better service to families.

The primary additional work is requiring documentation of home visits. Though caseworkers are required by policy to document the visits, Ms. Udow said in many cases those records fell by the wayside. The new system requires documentation of a visit before it will allow other information to be entered.

With the 25 percent turnover among caseworkers annually, Ms. Udow said the system will provide a more complete record that will allow the next caseworker a full background on the family.

But the department is also working with the University of Michigan on a study of why child welfare workers leave their posts in hopes of reducing that turnover rate.

"It's a very difficult job," she said.

Ms. Udow said the department is still focusing on keeping children with their families to the extent possible. She is working to have the Family to Family process in place by the end of next fiscal year that brings not only the family and the caseworker, but also such people as religious leaders, law enforcement and housing program officials to develop a safety plan for the children.

"Family to Family has as its goal to keep children at home if that can be safely done," Ms. Udow said.

And she said the department, statewide as well as in the regions already using Family to Family, have been successful at reducing the number of children in foster care. The department had a goal last year of reducing the number by 1 percent, but was able to cut it by 2 percent, she said. "That's means we're really working with families for fundamental change," she said, noting that the decrease in children in foster care did not result in an increase in repeat complaints about families.

She said children who have been removed from their homes have told they felt like they were the criminals. And she said often when children run away from foster homes, they return to their birth parents.

The process, which she said was more a change in philosophy at the department than a program, also includes recruiting foster parents. "It recruits foster families in neighborhoods where kids are coming out of so they don't have to change schools," she said.

But the process still shows a preference for placing children with relatives, Ms. Udow said. And she said the department has increased the number of background checks it runs each year to ensure that those family members are qualified to provide care.

Non-relative foster care providers already undergo the checks as part of their licensing process.

Ms. Udow said she plans a report on March 21 to discuss the racial imbalance in foster care. "Unfortunately we have a much higher rate of African-American children and Native American children in the child welfare system than they represent in the population as a whole," she said. "It's related to poverty but it's not totally explained by that."

The department is also implementing a new complaint line that will essentially allow an appeal if the caller feels an earlier complaint was not handled appropriately. "We want to add another vehicle for the community to call in complaints," Ms. Udow said. "We want to make sure they have a second voice that can hear them."

The second line would still allow callers to remain anonymous, she said.

Of the Ricky Holland case, which precipitated the latest round of discussions on child welfare, Ms. Udow said the department was still in the midst of its investigation. "We are literally going through thousands of pages of case files," she said. Officials are also re-interviewing those who filed complaints.

"We're trying to expedite it, but we want to make sure that we're thorough," she said.

Though the department's focus now is on keeping families together, Ms. Udow said she would not necessarily have second guessed the decision to remove him from his birth mother and place him with the Hollands, who adopted him and are now charged with killing him.

"That family was offered a lot of services," she said of Ricky's birth mother. "They didn't always follow up."

MIRS
March 9, 2006

Udow - We're Making Progress, But More Needs To Be Done

Marianne **UDOW**, Director of the Department of Human Services (DHS), today told reporters that her department has made a number of reforms over the past three years to improve child welfare — but there is more improvement to be done. "We're doing a better job of assessing risk and a better job of placing kids," Udow said.

The director included a new Family-to-Family approach in 38 counties as one of the changes being made. Family-to-Family is a team approach for making the best decisions in the best interest of the child at every step of the way in the child welfare system.

The agency is also requiring that background checks on relatives and unrelated caregivers be completed no later than one business day following the placement of a child. The old standard was set at seven days.

Other changes include policy flags that should trigger investigations:

- If there is an allegation of domestic violence in the home
- If the parents have other children in foster care, or their parental rights have been terminated
- If the child is three or under and the family has two or more complaints

Udow held her round table following recent news of the death of Ricky **HOLLAND**. The caseworker who worked with Holland before he was murdered by his adoptive parents, never identified a problem in the home.

Udow said one thing that will help to identify these problems sooner is the hiring of 51 additional child protective caseworkers — a measure called for by the governor in her Fiscal Year (2007) budget recommendation.

While sharing statistics with reporters, Udow was asked to comment on the fact that in 2005 there were 52 child deaths due to abuse or neglect — the same number recorded in 2000. These deaths include children who died from neglect or abuse and include children and families that may have never had contact with child protective services.

"We have continuing opportunities for improvement," admitted the director. "You're absolutely right that 52 is unacceptable."

A key problem facing the DHS and other state's child protection agencies is the relative high staff turnover. Michigan sees a staff turnover rate of 25 percent per year.

Udow remarked that the state and the University of Michigan are undertaking a study

on turnover but in the end, turnover is a key problem all states face.

"We've raised the rate of pay, but these are very stressful jobs," Udow admitted. She added that cases where a child dies often haunt caseworkers.

"When there is a child death, our caseworkers tell us they think about it forever," Udow said. "They live with those nightmares for their entire lives."

Udow said her agency is conducting a review of the Holland case. The Office of Children's Ombudsman is conducting a review and further down the line there will be a more formal team review of the death.

Changes to Oversight of Child Abuse Cases

March 9, 2006, 04:32 PM EST

Channel 6 News

The Department of Human Services says child abuse and neglect are growing problems in our state. That's why the department is announcing changes it hopes will keep more Michigan kids safe. A document outlines the department's goals for the next three years.

The director says it's not a reaction to how the state handled the case of 7-year-old Ricky Holland, and that the changes are part of a long-term strategy. The goal- to keep kids out of foster care and safe at home.

Since Maryanne Udow took over the Department of Human Services, she's been working to change the philosophy and the practice of immediately pulling kids out of troubled homes.

Maryanne Udow, Dept. of Human Services: "Our goal, first and foremost, is to keep them safely with families, if we can do that."

It's called the family-to-family program, and by the end of this year, it'll be in place across most of Michigan. Udow says it will help build families instead of tearing them apart.

Maryanne Udow: "75% of kids who come into the child welfare system are there because of neglect, not abuse."

Udow says sometimes kids taken out of their homes end up paying a very high price.

Maryanne Udow: "They've been in 10 different schools, many of them don't finish high school, many of them end up in the criminal justice system because they've had such disruptive lives."

Under the family-to-family program, the department won't remove a child until a community-based team weighs in.

Maryanne Udow: "We're partners with law enforcement, we're partners with the faith community, we're partners with housing."

And if it's decided a child must be removed, the family-to-family program will look for ways to keep some sense of stability in their lives.

Maryanne Udow: "Our goal, first and foremost, is to keep them safely with families. If we can't do that, 2nd, we keep them in their neighborhoods, in their schools, 3rd, we keep them with relatives."

Udow says removing a child from a community is a last resort. Right now the department is struggling with only about 700 caseworkers for the entire state. The governor is calling for more funding, but Udow says these changes can't wait

Minimum Wage Overshadows Heating

Immediately after the Senate passed a bill to increase the minimum wage, Sen. Mark **SCHAUER** (D-Battle Creek) expressed his frustration with the majority party for sweeping over an initiative he's been working on to take up their agenda.

"In the excitement, it's clear that low energy costs for low income people is not a priority of the Senate," Schauer said.

Thursday morning Schauer held a press conference about a bill that recently passed the U.S. Senate and would give an additional \$1 billion to the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). This program helps low-income families and seniors pay their energy bills.

In September Schauer introduced a resolution to encourage the U.S. Congress and the President to increase LIHEAP funding. Schauer held the press conference to once again bring the issue to the foreground and had intentions of calling for the resolution to be dismissed from committee on the Senate floor.

"Despite the relatively mild temperatures we've seen in Michigan over the past few months, heating bills are higher than ever before at a time when Michigan's families can least afford it," Schauer said. "And it's not just home heating. Gas prices have spiked again and with the summer travel season right around the corner they are not likely to go down any time soon. We must act now."

Schauer's resolution (SR 71) and Sen. Ray **BASHAM's** (D-Taylor) bill to increase the minimum wage have been sitting in committee for months. Right before the Senate took up Basham's bill, which completely drowned out anything else that happened in the Senate, Schauer asked that his bill be dismissed.

Sen. Bev. **HAMMERSTROM** (R-Temperance) passed his resolution for the day.

Before reporters could ask Schauer why he was making such a big deal about a resolution, he said that chances of the \$1 billion increase passing the U.S. House were slim and that Congress needed to know Michigan's position on the issue.

"It's important that the Michigan Senate go on record to the bi-partisan delegation in the U.S. House and the White House to let them know how we feel," said Schauer said.

Schauer said that by April 1, LIHEAP assistance will run out for many citizens. At that point, LIHEAP beneficiaries will have to pay off any money that they owe on installments between April and November. LIHEAP beneficiaries pay a portion of their bills. The installments constitute the remainder of bills not paid during their time on the program.

At the press conference Schauer also called for movement on a SR 61, which was introduced by Sen. Bob **EMERSON** (D-Flint) and would encourage Congress to do something to reduce gas prices.

STUNNER!

Senate ups minimum wage for 1st time in 9 years

Gary Heinlein and Oralandar Brand-Williams / The Detroit News

March 10, 2006

LANSING -- Michigan lawmakers on Thursday abruptly ended a nine-year freeze on the state's minimum wage, potentially bringing heftier paychecks to hundreds of thousands of workers.

In an unexpected move, the Senate voted unanimously to raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 an hour to \$6.95 Oct. 1. It would again increase to \$7.15 on July 1, 2007, and to \$7.40 on July 1, 2008.

The action was prompted by a drive to place on the fall ballot a constitutional amendment tying automatic minimum wage increases to the annual rate of inflation. Republicans fear a ballot proposal would guarantee a large Democratic turnout, hurting GOP candidates for governor, U.S. Senate and other offices.

Lawmakers and business leaders hope legislative action will head off that union-backed ballot drive. But the politics of the deal didn't impress low-wage workers, who focused on the prospect of living a little easier.

Tammy Pyles, 38, of Casco Township, a part-time cashier at Eagle Dollar and Discount store in Richmond, is married and the mother of three girls. She began working at the store about two years ago when her husband, Michael Pyles, 37, a union electrician, was laid off. She now makes \$5.25 an hour, and was pleased to learn about the Senate vote.

"I'm all for that," she said. "Right now (my paycheck) only pays for the phone bill, gas for the car and a little groceries. I want it to go through. That would be great and not just for me, but for everyone making a minimum wage. (They should) pass it for all of us making diddly. They make a lot more than we are."

Republicans in the Legislature previously had resisted moves to raise the wage, but numerous circumstances brought about a change of heart.

"This is a fair and workable approach," said Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming. "It will provide a sensible wage hike to workers while at the same time insuring that Michigan job providers are not saddled with onerous job killing provisions that are being pushed by supporters of a constitutional amendment."

Sikkema said he reminded colleagues that polls show the ballot measure would likely be approved by a four-to-one margin.

Republican legislative leaders have now put the measure on a fast track for approval. Matt Resch, spokesman for House Speaker Craig DeRoche, R-Novi, said the House could hold a vote to approve the measure as soon as Tuesday.

The Michigan Restaurant Association, among the most vocal opponents of an increase, now supports the measure.

"The evidence proves that raising Michigan's wage will kill Michigan jobs at a time when the state can ill-afford to lose more jobs," said Andy Deloney, public affairs director of the association. "However, if it's going to be raised it should be the Legislature and the governor that does it. The wrong way is through a constitutional amendment.

"Michigan's constitution was never intended to guarantee automatic annual pay increases to a select group of people."

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that around 90,000 Michigan workers earn at or below the current \$5.15. About 432,000 workers in Michigan earn less than the proposed \$7.40 slated for summer 2008.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm, who had pushed for the wage hike in her State of the State message this year, welcomed the action. But she said she also plans to continue her support for the ballot drive.

Michigan would become the 17th state to increase its minimum wage beyond the \$5.15 set by the federal government.

Sikkema said opponents of the ballot proposal will be able to say that a vote for the constitutional amendment would actually lower the minimum wage below the bill passed Thursday.

The ballot proposal would raise it to \$6.85 beginning next January and then provide that future increases would be tied to the inflation rate. It also would dramatically increase penalties for employers who failed to comply.

Michigan AFL-CIO President Mark Gaffney, whose union supports the petition drive, said no decisions about continuing the effort will be made until the House votes. A coalition made up mostly of unions, called Michigan Needs a Raise, was formed to carry out the ballot drive.

Republicans ordinarily could expect to be beaten up by their business supporters at the polls for measures such as the minimum wage increase, but it's clear that many corporate executives also see it as the lesser of two evils.

At the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, a long-time opponent of government-set minimum wages, vice president Rich Studley called the constitutional amendment "very radical and extreme." He said Granholm should call off the ballot drive if lawmakers approve the increases.

The Michigan Catholic Conference, which also supports the ballot plan, praised the Senate. "Work is more than a job," said Catholic Conference Vice President Paul Long. "It is a reflection of our human dignity and a way to contribute to the common good."

Agreeing with that was 19-year-old Wayne State University freshman Darren Woods, who works at a Subway restaurant in downtown Detroit. He works an

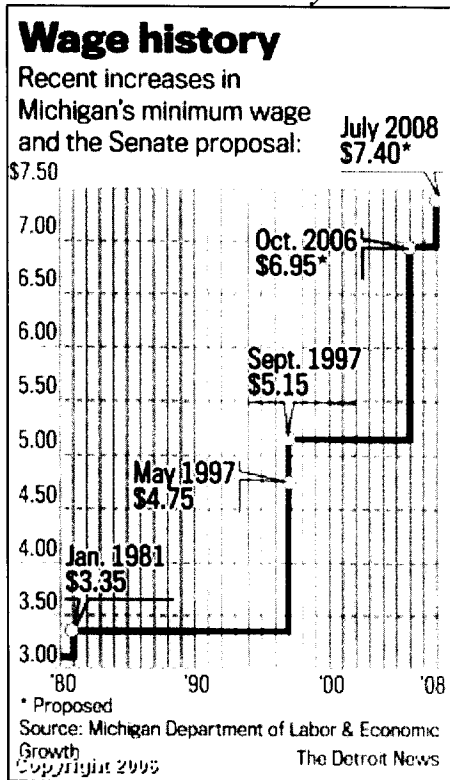
average of 37 hours a week and says an increase in the wage rate would be fantastic.

"It's good. Five dollars and 15 cents an hour is nothing for people who need money," he said. Woods makes \$5.25 an hour but is expecting to get a raise soon that will take him past \$6 an hour.

Woods' boss, Anthony Coker, a 21-year-old Detroit, also applauded the news.

"I'm pretty excited," he said. The current minimum wage is "pretty low. You have to work 45 hours a week just to get a decent paycheck."

You can reach Gary Heinlein at (313) 222-2470 or gheinlein@detnews.com.



Friday, March 10, 2006

Senate's wage hike is bad politics and policy

GOP sacrifices economic principle to co-opt Granholm's agenda

The Detroit News /

Senate Republicans must think themselves brilliant political strategists, having co-opted one of Gov. Jennifer Granholm's major campaign issues by passing a radical hike in the minimum wage.

But in doing so, they raise a question for voters: What's the point in having a conservative, Republican Legislature if it's going to act like a body of union-controlled Democrats? Why not just elect the real thing?

It's no secret that the Republican Party is worried that Granholm's petition drive to raise the minimum wage by \$2 from today's \$5.15 level will drive Democratic voters to the polls this fall.

The Senate is attempting to neutralize the issue by getting out ahead of the governor and voting to up the minimum wage initially to \$6.95 and ultimately to \$7.40.

Granholm immediately signaled her support for the bill. The only upside of the Senate's version is that it doesn't lock the minimum wage into the state Constitution and doesn't index it in perpetuity to inflation.

But it's still a job killer. Credible studies of the impact of minimum wage hikes conclude that when the rate goes up, employment opportunities for entry-level job seekers go down.

With Michigan's unemployment rate well above the national average, and with employers stampeding out of the state, any measure that kills jobs is horribly misguided.

And judged as a political strategy, Granholm outplayed Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming. Had Sikkema wanted to put the governor in a box, he would have pushed a much more modest wage hike, and forced the governor to either veto it, or accept it and drop the ballot initiative. That's the strategy the state House should adopt.

If it doesn't, Michigan will likely end up with a destructive minimum wage hike, crafted out of political motivations rather than sound policy.

It would burden job creating small businesses, shut many teens and low-income workers out of the job market, and signal once again that Michigan is not a good place to do business.

County Human Services director leaving post

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

GENESEE COUNTY

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION Wednesday, March 08, 2006

By Ron Fonger rfonger@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6317

GENESEE COUNTY - Denise Chambers, director of the Genesee County Department of Human Services since 1996, is leaving the position March 17.

Chambers, a Washington, D.C. native, came here after working as district manager for what was the Macomb County Family Independence Agency.

She started with the state agency in 1981 as an assistance payments worker before receiving a series of promotions.

The Flint Journal was unable to reach Chambers for comment, but an announcement of an open house from her office said she is moving to Philadelphia.

The open house is 3:30-5:30 p.m. Thursday in Mott Children's Health Center auditorium, 806 Tuuri Place, Flint. For more information or to R.S.V.P., call Cindy at (810) 760-2645. Chamber's replacement has not been announced by DHS.

- Ron Fonger

Federal Plan for Changes in Child Care Draws Protest

By ERIK ECKHOLM

The New York Times

Published: March 10, 2006

A Bush administration plan to reorganize programs for low-income families has brought protests by service agencies around the country, which fear it signals a waning in the federal commitment to child care assistance for working mothers.

Some 240 agencies and advocacy groups have signed a letter to the secretary of health and human services, Michael O. Leavitt, asking him not to downgrade the Child Care Bureau, a unit created by the Clinton administration to oversee subsidies for low-income mothers and improve the quality of child care.

The proposed change, the letter says, "minimizes the importance of child care assistance in supporting working families, particularly low-income parents."

The letter was delivered yesterday to the Department of Health and Human Services and to Congressional leaders, said Helen Blank of the National Women's Law Center, which collected the signatures. Signers included the Child Welfare League of America, the Y.W.C.A. and Easter Seals.

The apparent downgrading of the Child Care Bureau has also stirred concern in Congress, where Democrats and Republicans are discussing an appeal to the administration.

The plan, which requires no Congressional approval, was made known to lawmakers in a letter from Mr. Leavitt on Feb. 22. Among other changes to improve "efficiency and effectiveness," he wrote, the bureau, which now stands alone, is to be folded into the Office of Family Assistance, which oversees the drive to put welfare mothers into jobs.

All sides agree that child care subsidies are needed to help welfare recipients, the poorest of the poor, go to work. But by law, federal aid is also given more widely to mothers in low-paying jobs, who may be struggling to stay off welfare in the first place.

The Child Care Bureau will send some \$5 billion to the states this year for child care programs and oversee the spending of billions more in state funds. It also sponsors

research and promotes using day care as an educational opportunity. Placing it in the family assistance office, critics fear, will limit its vision and impact.

"Child care assistance is critical for low-income working families as well as those transitioning off welfare," said Joan Lombardi, who in 1995 became the first chief of the bureau and now heads the Children's Project, a research and advocacy group in Washington. "This is a step backward for working families."

Critics say the change is the latest of several administration decisions that will limit aid for child care in an era when growing legions of the working poor need it more than ever.

But Wade F. Horn, assistant secretary for children and families, said in a telephone interview that the planned consolidation of offices would "create synergy."

With welfare reforms, Dr. Horn said, the family assistance office spends less on cash payments to mothers and more on work supports, both for women leaving welfare and for those struggling to avoid it.

"We do believe that with finite resources, we ought to target them on those who are most in need, and those are the people trying to escape welfare," he said.

In another change that has prompted questions, Mr. Leavitt wrote in his letter of Feb. 22 that program officers in the department's 10 regional bureaus would report directly to their respective chiefs in Washington, rather than through regional administrators.

Critics say this will make it harder for regional administrators to coordinate activities and will strengthen the position of political appointees in Washington over career experts in the field. But Dr. Horn said it would eliminate wasteful layers of bureaucracy and help bring consistency to programs around the country.

Gongwer
March 9, 2006

CAPITAL NOTEBOOK

CHILD SUPPORT: Attorney General Mike Cox announced Thursday that his Child Support Division had collected more than \$23 million in back child support since the division was created in April 2003.

“Our goal is simple: help children get the financial support they need and deserve,” Mr. Cox said. “We want this program to hold parents accountable for their moral obligation to care for their children, for kids to receive the support they need, and for the public to be more aware of this incredibly important issue. This isn’t about convictions, or jailing offenders, but about getting people paying kids, and paying on a regular basis.”

A 'champion' for men dragged into fatherhood

Friday, March 10, 2006

SCOTT DAVIS

THE SAGINAW NEWS

Matt Dubay doesn't see himself as a deadbeat trying to duck child support for his 8-month-old daughter.

The Saginaw Township resident views himself as a champion for men who are "railroaded" into becoming fathers for children they never wanted.

"I don't believe men have any say and are not given any rights whatsoever (in childbirth decisions)," the 25-year-old says. "Whatever a man has to say is simply ignored."

The computer programmer says that frustration led to his filing a lawsuit Thursday in U.S. District Court in Bay City against a former girlfriend who gave birth to a child he didn't want, then obtained a court order forcing him to pay \$500 monthly in child support.

The National Center for Men, a men's rights organization based in Long Island, N.Y., also is filing the lawsuit -- dubbed "Roe v. Wade for Men" -- against Lauren Wells, also of Saginaw Township.

It's shaping up as a battle of the sexes as advocates for men's rights hope the lawsuit allows men to decline financial support in unintended pregnancies, while women advocates contend the support of a child from both parents -- even in broken relationships -- is a cornerstone of American child-rearing.

"You would be opening up a Pandora's box," says Susan K. Prine, director of Saginaw County Friend of the Court, an agency that oversees child support payments. "If an individual thought, 'I don't want to have a relationship with this child,' and if they know there are no consequences, that would be a horrible thing for society."

"You would have a lot of men coming out of the woodwork saying, 'She lied to me.' "

Wells declined comment Thursday, saying her attorney advised her to make no statement. She also declined to name her attorney.

The lawsuit before Judge David M. Lawson also names as a co-defendant County Prosecutor Michael D. Thomas, whose office advocates for custodial parents in child support cases. The suit seeks to extend to men the privacy right granted to women over childbearing decisions in the U.S. Supreme Court landmark ruling *Roe v. Wade* in 1973.

It contends that Michigan law discriminates against non-custodial fathers when it routinely orders them to pay child support. Dubay wants federal courts to overturn the law, as well as reimburse his child support payments and legal expenses.

Thomas declined comment, saying he had not read the lawsuit.

Gloria A. Woods, a leading Saginaw Valley women's advocate, says the lawsuit is frivolous.

"Pregnancy takes sperm as well as an egg," Woods says. "The essence of what happened is that Mr. Dubay had unprotected sex. He needs to accept responsibility for that action."

"If Mr. Dubay ever gets pregnant, I'll support his right to make his own decisions about his pregnancy."

Woods, program director of the Underground Railroad, a shelter for battered women in Saginaw, says she is not speaking on the agency's behalf.

Dubay says a lawsuit was the last thing on his mind when he began dating Wells in late summer of 2004. He says they dated for about three months and had unprotected sex after she claimed she was infertile and was taking birth control pills for other medical reasons.

For reasons he wouldn't discuss, Dubay says the couple broke up in October 2004. Three weeks later, she landed a bombshell: She told him she was pregnant with his child.

Recalling her claims of infertility, Dubay says he felt deceived.

"I was quite shocked," Dubay says. "I'm generally a pretty level-headed person, and I tried to stay as calm as I could."

He says the two talked about the possibility of aborting the child or placing it for adoption. He says Wells expressed a desire to keep the child.

He says they never discussed marrying.

"I painted a very clear picture at that point that I was not ready to be a father," Dubay says. "I was not ready to be a part of the child's life. She says she would raise the child completely on her own, and that I would help pay for it."

Dubay says he never told her he would pay child support, but told her, "I would do what I had to do."

The birth of Dubay's daughter passed without his knowledge. In the summer of 2005, Dubay received court papers stating Wells was suing him for child support.

That led to the first -- and only -- time he has seen his daughter. He saw Wells and his daughter briefly during a court-ordered meeting last summer in which technicians tested his blood and his child's. The test confirmed he was her father.

"I had a number of reactions," Dubay says of seeing his daughter. "It was difficult to look away."

Dubay says he is not an uncaring person but honestly believes immersing himself into his child's life, such as seeing her on weekends, would not provide her a stable childhood.

"I still to this point believe that it isn't right to be part of the child's life," Dubay says. "An unwilling parent is not good for a child."

Moreover, Dubay believes he shouldn't have to pay to raise a child when he wasn't part of the decision-making that brought her into the world.

"He chose to have sex with this lady," Prine says. "He chose to not have the protection himself. You've got to live with the choices you make."

Feb. 10, court records show, Saginaw County Probate Judge Patrick J. McGraw ordered Dubay to pay \$500 in monthly child support to Wells and his daughter. Dubay owes his first payment this month.

That financial obligation is proving a hardship, Dubay says. To prepare for the burden, he says, he sold a vehicle and took a roommate into his home.

He says he recently lost his job at Diamond Computer in Saginaw Township, which filed for bankruptcy, and took a lower-salary position at Yeo & Yeo Computer Consulting in Saginaw. He declined to disclose his salary.

Frustrated with his predicament, he contacted The National Center for Men, and officials there expressed a desire to make his situation into a federal test case for father's rights.

Woods says she doubts the lawsuit will make a ripple in legal precedents.

"I don't see it as a battle of the sexes," Woods says. "This is a small group of men who are very vocal and very focused on trying to reduce their financial obligations to their children and increase their ability to control all of the decisions about their children." v

Scott Davis is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9665. Staff writers Darryl Q. Tucker and Jean Spenner contributed to this report.

Bush Urges More Money for Religious Charities

By ELISABETH BUMILLER

Published: March 10, 2006

The New York Times

COLLEGE PARK, Ga., March 9 — President Bush said Thursday that his administration had made progress by awarding more than \$2.1 billion last year to social programs operated by churches, synagogues and mosques, a modest increase over 2004.

But Mr. Bush said that corporate foundations were not doing enough and that they should give more money to religious charities.

Mr. Bush made his comments at a conference in Washington organized by the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives before leaving for a state Republican Party fund-raiser in Georgia.

"I am confident that the faith community is achieving unbelievable successes throughout our country," Mr. Bush said at the Washington Hilton. "And therefore I would urge our corporate foundations to reach beyond the norm, to look for those social entrepreneurs who haven't been recognized heretofore, to continue to find people who are running programs that are making a significant difference in people's lives."

Mr. Bush said that the White House had looked closely at 50 large foundations — he did not say which ones — and that one in five had charters that prohibited them from giving money to religious institutions for social service programs.

"I would hope they would revisit their charters," Mr. Bush said.

Mr. Bush has made his religion-based initiative a central part of his "compassionate conservative" agenda since his first year in the White House, but has run into hurdles trying to carry it out.

Legislation that would have made it easier for religious charities to seek government money for social programs sputtered in Congress in Mr. Bush's first term. He bypassed Capitol Hill and signed executive orders that created religion-based offices in 10 agencies.

Mr. Bush signed an executive order this week to establish a religion-based office in an 11th agency, the Homeland Security Department.

Mr. Bush has long said the directives, which removed barriers for religious groups that sought federal money for programs that help prisoners, the homeless, addicts and others, were necessary because religious charities have been denied government money simply because they were religious.

His critics have said Mr. Bush was using taxpayer money to promote organized religion and breaking down barriers between church and state.

In College Park, Mr. Bush perfunctorily recognized Ralph Reed, a former head of the Christian Coalition and a top Bush campaign adviser whose Georgia candidacy for lieutenant governor has been tarnished by ties to Jack Abramoff, the lobbyist.

Mr. Reed, who was in the ballroom at the Georgia International Convention Center at the state party's annual Presidents' Day dinner, did not appear onstage with Mr. Bush. Other Republicans did, among them Gov. Sonny Perdue, who is facing two aggressive Democratic challengers.

Mr. Bush also appeared with Max Burns and Mac Collins, two former House members who are trying to unseat Democratic incumbents.

Mr. Bush mentioned Mr. Reed briefly, along with another Republican candidate for lieutenant governor, Casey Cagle. "I appreciate them both being here," Mr. Bush said.

Letters to the Editor

Lansing State Journal

March 10, 2006

Critics have motives

I have been with Highfields Inc. for nearly five years and was in human resources for 20 years before joining Highfields. I've learned some painful truths about the treatment of delinquent boys.

Some agencies don't provide the guidance they claim; they don't appropriately recruit, train and oversee their staff: bad things happen. Recent Florida headlines corroborate this.

I'm proud to say I'm part of Highfields. I wanted to work for an institution that makes a difference in kids' lives. I found that with Highfields.

Boys here are treated with care, respect and are exposed to highly trained staff, who give them ways to change their behaviors and thus their futures. The satisfaction of helping boys learn to trust and to develop meaningful relationships makes a difficult job worthwhile.

Those who attack Highfields have their own motives. I don't believe those motives include the welfare of the boys we care for.

Pat Mills
director of human resources
Highfields Inc.
Jackson

Additional funding works for job agency

State gives \$62,000 to South Central Michigan Works

Thursday, March 09, 2006

By Paul Overeiner

povereiner@citpat.com -- 768-4917

South Central Michigan Works, which provides job training and other services to clients in Jackson, Hillsdale and Lenawee counties, will have nearly \$62,000 more for program funding this year.

Statewide, more than \$2.3 million was awarded to Michigan Works agencies through Work First Incentive Awards announced by the governor's office this week.

"It's always good when you have more money," said Christine Quinn, president of South Central Michigan Works.

Quinn said the agency is not permitted to turn away clients. Last year South Central Michigan Works assisted more than 62,000 people referred from the state Department of Human Services, including about 28,000 in the Jackson service office.

South Central Michigan Works operates from a budget of about \$10.7 million.

Services range from job training and placement to assisting and supporting clients recently placed in jobs.

Quinn said the grant money will be applied to programs that have high demand. Last year, supportive services, which range from transportation to clothing assistance for employed clients, required added funding, Quinn said.

This year's incentive awards ranged from \$413,951 for the Detroit Workforce Development Department to \$8,705 for the Livingston County Michigan Works office.

Brian Marcotte, manager of the welfare reform program for the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth, said incentive awards are based on meeting performance measures established last year.

Those measures range from the number of work force participants who maintain employment for at least 90 days to the number of clients placed in condensed vocational programs, Marcotte said.

States fail to use nearly \$2 billion in Katrina aid

Only 11 of them, including Michigan, have made requests totaling \$25.5 million.

Hope Yen / Associated Press

Friday, March 10, Detroit News

WASHINGTON -- Nearly \$2 billion in federal disaster aid for Katrina evacuees is sitting unclaimed more than six months after lawmakers approved the emergency funding.

Congress approved a \$2 billion block grant program in September for displaced Gulf Coast families -- regardless of income -- to help them get back on their feet after the Aug. 29 storm.

But only 11 states, including Michigan, have made requests totaling \$25.5 million in aid so far, according to the Health and Human Services Department. Several states said they didn't want the bureaucratic hassle, or weren't certain if displaced families qualified for aid under the program.

"The funds are there, and it's deeply troubling they're not being used," said Mark Greenberg, executive director of the Task Force on Poverty at the Center for American Progress. "These funds could be used right now to help families in tremendous need."

It's unclear how many displaced families are missing out on the money from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. Several states say they are opting to provide help out of their own pockets, while in other cases families with higher incomes who are eligible aren't seeking the aid.

According to HHS, about 420,000 families were displaced by the Gulf Coast hurricanes. About 50,000 were low-income families who generally aren't eligible because they were receiving TANF aid before Katrina hit.

Wade Horn, assistant secretary for HHS, said many needy families also may be receiving federal disaster aid through other agencies.

"It's important to keep in mind that the \$25 million drawn down doesn't mean that's the sum total to help evacuees," he said. "States don't tend to leave money lying on the table if they need it. They still have until Aug. 31 to apply, so perhaps more states will come in between now and then."

Overcoming poverty

Robert Warner
The Enquirer

March 10, 2006

The obstacles to overcoming poverty in South Central Michigan are in for a hard look next week.

Three days of free workshops on the "Bridges Out of Poverty" will be presented in Battle Creek by a Houston-based poverty expert, Ruby Payne, and her consulting firm, Aha! Process Inc.

The workshops are a key moment in a burgeoning effort to attack the poverty problem across the region, said Katie Kennedy, a paralegal and community educator at Legal Services of South Central Michigan. More than two dozen community organizations, ranging from social services agencies to educators to churches, have joined the effort.

Of Payne, Kennedy said "she's been making waves for quite a while across the country" in the education sector, and the effects of her message have spread into other fields, especially social services.

During the first-day program, Payne will discuss such issues as the mindsets of various economic classes, what she calls the "hidden rules" of poverty, and resources that the community and individuals can use to overcome poverty.

On Wednesday evening, she'll present a summary of her "Framework for Understanding Poverty" program, intended for those who can't attend the full-day workshop. The Wednesday session will be during a reception that begins at 6 p.m. at Burnham Brook. The reception is free and open to the public.

The Aha team's visit will continue Thursday and March 17 with two days of follow-up workshops for workers in social services, other community organizations and interested individuals.

Members of the team will return to Battle Creek on June 14 to repeat the first-day workshop and on Aug. 8 and 9 to conduct followup workshops for teachers.

All of the programs are free, with costs covered by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Experts in Residence program.

Kennedy said she saw Payne in Traverse City in 2005 and encouraged fellow social services agencies to bring her to Battle Creek.

At first, representatives of five local organizations — Legal Services, the Work First program at Michigan Works!, Guardian Inc., the Women's Co-op and Trinity Lutheran Church — were hatching a plan for an anti-poverty initiative using collaboration, relationships and mentoring. They've since been joined by a broad range of groups in the run-up to next week's workshops.

The workshops were organized by human services agencies, educational institutions, churches, businesses and other community organizations across Calhoun, Branch, Barry and St. Joseph counties, Kennedy said. Those groups intend to work together to implement the strategies presented at the workshops.

The daylong workshops will be held at First Assembly of God Church, 800 S. 24th St. Advance registration is required for the all-day sessions.

To register for the workshops, visit the Web site of the Community Action Agency of South Central Michigan at www.caascm.org. For more information, visit the Web site or call Katie Kennedy of Legal Services of South Central Michigan at 965-3951.

Payne is a Goshen (Ind.) College graduate who earned a master's degree at Western Michigan University and a doctorate at Loyola University in Chicago. She's the author of two books on poverty, "A Framework for Understanding Poverty" and "Bridges Out of Poverty." She has worked as a teacher, principal, administrator and consultant in the education field. She founded Aha! Process Inc. in 1996.

Robert Warner is a special projects reporter. He can be reached at 966-0674 or rwarners@battlecr.gannett.com.

Originally published March 10, 2006



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

Contact: Stepheni Schlinker or Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

Jackson County collaborative receives \$150,000 Great Start Collaborative grant

Early Childhood Investment Corporation grants focus on early childhood development and care

March 10, 2006

JACKSON – Today the superintendent of the Jackson ISD joined board members of the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) and local legislators to celebrate a \$150,000 grant to support a local Great Start Collaborative that will strengthen early childhood development and care in Jackson County.

Michigan Department of Human Services director Marianne Udow and ECIC chief operating officer Mike Foley presented a ceremonial check to Dr. John Graves, Jackson County ISD Superintendent.

From the day she took office, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has maintained that early childhood development and care is a critical investment in the economic viability of the state.

"Children learn more from birth to age three than at any other time, setting the stage for future success in school and in life," Granholm said. "High-quality early childhood development and care is a wise investment in our children and our economy."

The Early Childhood Investment Corporation, which the Governor announced in her 2005 State of the State address, is developing the framework for effective early childhood development and care programs through partnerships with local collaboratives around the state. The local Great Start Collaboratives will use the grant money from the ECIC to conduct a community assessment and develop a strategic plan for the development of a comprehensive system of early childhood services and supports, accessible to all children from birth to kindergarten and their families.

"These grants will help bring together the public and private sectors, including government, business, civic, faith, education, and community groups to develop a long-standing, sustained focus on early learning and childhood development," said Mike Foley. "The board was able to award this first round of grants with the resources currently available, and is committed to funding Great Start Collaboratives throughout the state as new funding sources are identified."

Intermediate school districts will act as fiduciaries for the grants. In addition to Jackson County ISD, 13 other ISDs and RESAs around the state were also awarded funding for planning and/or implementation of Great Start Collaboratives.

-MORE-

"Children who participate in high-quality early childhood development programs are better prepared to enter elementary school, are more likely to pursue secondary education and have lower dropout rates and higher high school graduation rates," DHS Director Marianne Udow said. "By improving the skills of a large fraction of the workforce, these programs for poor children will reduce poverty and strengthen the state's ability to compete in the global market."

For more information about the ECIC and Great Start collaboratives, visit the Project Great Start Web site at www.michigan.gov/greatstart

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JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

Contact: Stepheni Schlinker or Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

Michigan Heart Gallery on Display in Flint *Public to view professional portraits of Michigan foster children who are waiting for adoption*

March 10, 2006

FLINT – There are more than 4,000 children in Michigan with parental rights terminated who are either waiting for their adoption to be finalized or waiting for a family. Most of these children are among those hardest to place – kids who are older and members of minorities and/or sibling groups. Adoption for older youth in the foster care system is a priority to ensure they do not leave the foster care system without a connection to a supportive adult.

Sixty of these children are featured in a heart-warming photographic exhibit called The Michigan Heart Gallery. The Michigan Heart Gallery will be on display from March 12 – April 5, 2006 at the Flint Public Library, 1026 Kearsley St., in Flint.

A special afternoon event honoring the children, photographers and families who participated in this event will be held on Monday, March 13, 2006 from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. The public is invited to attend this event.

The Michigan Heart Gallery, a collaborative effort between the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, the Adoptive Family Support Network and the Michigan Department of Human Services, seeks to bring our community closer to the faces and voices of children waiting for a “forever family.” The Michigan Heart Gallery features portraits of Michigan’s waiting children who come from various regions of the state and are representative of different races and ages.

“The Michigan Heart Gallery has been an amazing undertaking,” Kristen Donnay, intake coordinator for the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, said. “The portraits of the children are compelling. They draw you in and make you feel like you know the child. Equally as impressive has been the time, energy and compassion that the photographers have brought to the project.”

Recruitment activities such as the Heart Gallery remind people that there are many children in Michigan who are waiting to be adopted.

“Most of the children featured have been waiting for a long time to find a family to call their own,” Marianne Udow, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services, said. “While we hope the children featured in The Heart Gallery will find families, the larger goal of The Heart Gallery is to promote the idea of caring for and adopting children from the foster care system. We know from experience that if these children are not seen, and if we do not continue to educate the public about older children who need families, then they are forgotten. We are thrilled that the public will have a chance to view these portraits, get to know the children and possibly take action to see if adoption may be right for them.”

-MORE-

The photographs in The Heart Gallery were taken by more than 50 professional photographers who donated their time, talent and resources to take portraits that help capture the spirit of children in the foster care system. The Heart Gallery allows these children to be seen in an artistic, poignant and tasteful photographic exhibit. The kids thoroughly enjoyed their photo shoot experience. Some children were able to help select which portrait to feature in The Heart Gallery, while others came up with their own poses and some were given lessons in photography during the photo shoot, allowing them to become budding photographers themselves. Professional photographer Andre LaRoche volunteered to participate in The Michigan Heart Gallery and photographed 11-year-old Anthony.

"After meeting Anthony and walking around the youth home looking for a location to photograph him, I had to wipe tears from my eyes," LaRoche said. "My son is four years old and I give him and he gives me so much love. Without him, my life would be empty. I cannot easily think of all the boys at this center, with no loving parents, without a home, with their hopes and dreams possibly out of their reach."

For more than two years Anthony has been in the foster care system, waiting for his forever family. Recently, he was matched with a family after his Heart Gallery photograph caught their eye on the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange Web site.

Another piece of The Michigan Heart Gallery is a small sampling of portraits of successful adoptive families. The Heart Gallery will feature up to 10 families who have opened their hearts and homes to children from the foster care system.

"These wonderful families show others that it is possible to build a family through special needs adoption," Udow said. "Despite the rough times that they might have faced along the way, they prove how much love and care can do for these children."

The Heart Gallery concept was initially founded by the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department in 2001 as a way to help foster children in protective custody who are waiting for adoptive families find the families they desire. Stirring photographs, which reveal the children's spirits and individuality, have helped many of them find loving homes. The Heart Gallery has expanded to dozens of states and cities since 2001. Heart Galleries all over the United States have been featured in *People* magazine, the *New York Times* and on CNN, MSNBC and the Today Show.

For more information about The Michigan Heart Gallery and how you can get involved, please call (800) 589-6273 or visit The Michigan Heart Gallery Web site at www.miheart.org

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